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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [OVIP](#) [RAMOS](#) [HORTA](#) [JOSE](#)  
SUBJECT: JOSE RAMOS-HORTA VISITS WASHINGTON

CLASSIFIED BY: Hans Klemm, Ambassador, EXEC, State.  
REASON: 1.4 (d)

11. (SBU) Summary. On February 24-26, 2009, Jose Ramos-Horta will make his first visit to Washington as President of Timor-Leste. The Nobel Peace Prize laureate hopes to acquaint himself with leaders of the new Obama Administration and renew old friendships among members of the U.S. Congress. He will make one or two public addresses to strengthen the profile of Timor-Leste in America. President Ramos-Horta broadly will seek to reaffirm the U.S.-Timor-Leste partnership, express gratitude for past assistance including that granted in the immediate aftermath of the attempt on his life one year ago, and explore new avenues of cooperation. Always outspoken, Ramos-Horta can also be expected to fault the recent decision not to make Timor-Leste eligible for a Millennium Challenge Cooperation compact. As the leader of a young, vulnerable and fragile Southeast Asian democracy, we should affirm American's commitment and encourage Ramos-Horta to continue his efforts to stabilize and pull his country out of poverty on the basis of sound economic policy, the rule of law and national reconciliation. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Elected to a five year term in May 2007 as Timor-Leste's second president, Jose Ramos-Horta knows the U.S. well, having resided in American for fifteen years during the Indonesian occupation of Timor (during which time he doggedly lobbied at the UN for Timor-Leste's recognition and independence, eventually earning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1996) and as a regular participant in UN gatherings or other events. This will be his first visit to Washington as his country's President, however, and he will be seeking to meet with leaders of the Obama Administration as the head of state of a fragile, hopefully stabilizing, but still impoverished Southeast Asian democracy. Within Timor-Leste, Ramos-Horta is one of the strongest advocates of a robust partnership with the U.S., and has publicly advocated for more U.S. engagement in the development of his country's national security capabilities. He personally has directed his government to closely align itself with the U.S., for example, on UN votes supporting human rights and democracy in countries such as North Korea and Iran.

13. (U) Ramos-Horta campaigned for president in 2007 on the themes of national reconciliation and fighting poverty. Once in office, however, the self-styled "President of the Poor" quickly became frustrated by the lack of executive authority granted his office by Timor's constitution. Although bereft of financial resources or policy tools to direct antipoverty programs of his

own, Ramos-Horta uses his bully pulpit, traveling the back roads of Timor-Leste more often than any other senior politician and scolding government ministers in public consultations for their ineffectiveness. He's imaginative in finding leverage in unexpected ways, encouraging both the U.S. and Australian militaries to station engineering units in Timor-Leste to repair schools and clinics to improve service delivery to the underprivileged, in addition to training with Timor-Leste's military.

14. (C) Ramos-Horta has a distinctly mixed record on his second major objective, fostering national reconciliation. Coming into the presidency a year after the 2006 crisis, he concluded that the best way to achieve reconciliation was to issue a blanket amnesty for the perpetrators of violence, and forego the establishment of truth and accountability, or the provision of compensation for victims. He managed to get an amnesty bill passed by Parliament in 2007, but it was later thrown out on constitutional grounds. In May 2008 Ramos-Horta pardoned the sole significant member of the former government to be tried and found guilty for actions in the 2006 crisis, again dismissing concerns that he might be contributing to a culture of impunity.

In October 2009, Ramos-Horta used the occasion of the release of the Indonesia-Timorese Truth and Friendship Commission report on the events of 1999 to again promote a general amnesty, but was firmly rebuked by key members of the National Parliament.

15. (C) Also in the spirit of reconciliation, Ramos-Horta has tried repeatedly to serve as a bridge between the governing coalition and the main opposition party, Fretilin. Symbolic of the contentiousness and oft inflammatory nature of Timorese politics, Fretilin, although participating fully (and largely

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constructively) as opposition in the National Parliament, still maintains that the current government is illegal, unconstitutional and illegitimate. Ramos-Horta has sought to find ways to engage Fretilin on issues of national importance, arguing that in a post-conflict environment major parties cannot be excluded from key decisions and instead must be engaged in dialogue and consensus building. One mediation effort in early 2008 seemed about to yield fruit, but then stuttered to a stop with the president's shooting. Ramos-Horta on February 9, 2009, launched another attempt, this time with the help of the Swiss-based Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, to create a mechanism to encourage cross-party and inter-generational dialogue. He asked for donor financing for this effort, including from the U.S., although the strength of commitment from either the opposition or the governing coalition to this project remains uncertain.

16. (C) Once he recovered from his wounds, Ramos-Horta fairly quickly resumed an active international travel schedule to advocate for his country -- and himself. Already in 2009, he will have visited Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and New Zealand before arriving in New York on February 17, 2009. Never shy regarding his ambitions for the world stage, he touted himself as a candidate for UN Secretary General several years ago and he was tempted by the open position of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2008. His eagerness to be seen and taken seriously as an international player has led him to make strong and occasionally rash pronouncements on far-flung issues, sometimes counter to Timorese interests. His outspoken views on Burma, condemning the regime's behavior while promoting the removal of economic sanctions and increased engagement, led Rangoon to place a veto on any consideration within ASEAN of Timor-Leste becoming its next member (Timor's highest foreign policy priority). A year ago, he seriously irritated Timor's two neighbors, Australia and Indonesia, with ill-founded and reckless remarks regarding events surrounding his shooting. He regularly chastises the U.S. for its embargo of Cuba.

17. (C) Issues that President Ramos-Horta will likely raise during his conversations with USG principals include the following.

-- Peace Corps: A very successful and locally renowned Peace Corps Volunteer program was suspended in 2006 at the height of Timor's crisis. President Ramos-Horta will invite its resumption. Embassy Dili strongly supports a return to Timor-Leste by the Peace Corps and will submit a security assessment concluding that local conditions well exceed those necessary to ensure the safety of volunteers.

-- U.S.-Timor partnership: Both sides should be ready to reaffirm the health and vibrancy of U.S.-Timor-Leste bilateral relations. We should be ready to thank Ramos-Horta for the strong bilateral alignment that exists in international fora in support of democracy and human rights, and applaud his personal experience and long standing commitment to these principles. Upon the election of President Obama, he issued a warm public note of congratulation and was grateful for President Bush's sharp condemnation of the attack on his life in February 2008.

-- Security sector reform: As supreme commandar of Timor-Leste's defense force, Ramos-Horta has long been a proponent of increased U.S. contributions to Timor-Leste's security, including professionalization of its military and police. There is no stronger advocate within Timor-Leste of U.S. ship visits, light joint military exercises or community relations activities by U.S. forces. In a November 2008 speech in Darwin, he welcomed greater involvement by the U.S. and Australia in Timor's security, especially in the area of maritime security. He has even gone so far as to invite the U.S. military to make full use of Timorese facilities, including the large airfield outside of Baucau. Ramos-Horta is grateful for the recent expansion of the U.S. Pacific Command's engagement in Timor-Leste and will welcome indications that it will continue.

-- Recent developments in Timor-Leste: President Ramos-Horta will want to share his positive assessment of the performance of PM Gusmao's government. Its achievements include resolving several major consequences of the 2006 crisis (resettling internally displaced refugees and resolving the grievances of the "petitioners," those that mutinied against the military and precipitated the collapse of the government) and extending a

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basic social safety net. Timor-Leste's government is now focusing on infrastructure, rural development and education. Timor-Leste has enjoyed a rare, year-long period of stability and Ramos-Horta is committed to extending it, encouraging for example a more serious commitment from PM Gusmao's government to the reform of Timor-Leste's security sector.

-- U.S. contribution to Timor-Leste's social and economic development: Timor-Leste is Asia's poorest country and its social development indicators resemble those of the most impoverished countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. President Ramos-Horta has been an occasional skeptic of U.S. and other donor aid programs, asserting they overly benefit international consultants and deliver relatively little to Timor-Leste's poor. He sharply criticized both the Millennium Challenge Corporation's recent decision to find Timor-Leste ineligible for a compact and its organizing concept, stating the U.S. should be generous with poor countries in need, not when they reach a state of policy perfection. In response to recent Embassy Dili efforts to better inform him of the size and composition of our local aid programs (70 percent of which goes to agriculture and rural development), Ramos-Horta has become a stronger proponent of our projects.

-- Justice and Reconciliation: As discussed above, Ramos-Horta consistently has promoted amnesty to heal the nation's wounds rather than accountability. He asserts that Timor's institutions of justice are inadequate and the country's political culture insufficiently mature to accommodate a full application of the law for serious crimes in either 1999 or 2006. His stance arguably has encouraged a sense of impunity and undermined the full commitment of the Timorese to the rule of law. We should remind Ramos-Horta of the importance of

justice and the rule of law to Timor-Leste's stability and democratic development -- and of the importance of his personal commitment to these principles.

-- Intelligence Services Support: Timor-Leste has little effective intelligence gathering or analytical capability. Not only did the events of February 11, 2008, come as a complete surprise to Timor-Leste's leadership, but the government's lack of intelligence capabilities and dependence on an archaic, clandestine network of informants seriously eroded its ability to capture the perpetrators. The threat from international traffickers and crime syndicates to Timor-Leste's stability is compounded by weak law enforcement and intelligence capabilities. The Gusmao government hopes soon to establish an International Crisis Management Center to coordinate Timor-Leste's intelligence functions and has asked for USG support. Ramos-Horta may explore the extension of such assistance.

18. (C) Comment. Ramos-Horta repeatedly sought to meet Secretary Rice during his attendance at recent UN General Assemblies, but failed to do so. He is conscious of the absence of civilian ministerial-level visitors to Timor-Leste in recent years, and recently shared with the Ambassador his disappointment and sense of being overlooked by the U.S. Ramos-Horta, despite his blemishes, has been a positive, constructive force in the democratic development of Timor-Leste. By nature and conviction he is a very strong friend of the U.S. A warm opening by Administration principals to Timor-Leste's President will go a very long way to assuage his bruised feelings and ensure the viability of our mutual commitment to the success of democracy in Timor-Leste.

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